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A PAINTED CHRISTIAN TOMB AT BEIT JIBRIN.

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In the second number of the first volume of *Art and Archaeology* (September, 1914) an account was given of a painted tomb, belonging to the Christian era, that had been discovered the previous year at Beit Jibrin. This was intended to be a preliminary report, with the expectation that in due course of time the illustrations showing the interior decorations of the tomb would be reproduced in color. The fulfillment of this plan has been delayed up to the present by exigencies arising from the World War. It has seemed particularly desirable to make some more permanent record of this tomb because of the likelihood that all of its decorations will be speedily obliterated by exposure to the weather and by the vandalism of the natives.

Had such a burial place come to light in another country, it might be deserving of little attention, but in Palestine painted tombs of any description are very rare. Almost nothing of this kind, of any importance, has been reported in the twenty years since the notable discovery of Dr. Peters and Dr. Thiersch.¹ There are comparatively few centers in Palestine where we have reason to anticipate that future excavations will lead to developments in this field.

It was in March, 1913, that the rumor first reached me in Jerusalem that a tomb had been found recently at Beit Jibrin, with cocks painted in red upon the wall. The message was brought by a villager who was offering a figurine for sale, which it was affirmed had been found in this tomb. This was all the information that I had to guide me when, on the 12th of the following May, I came to the town in the course of one of the tours of the American School of Oriental Research. My efforts to get some clue as to the location of the tomb with the cocks were at first entirely without results. It was only on the second day, a few hours before my departure, that I succeeded in my quest. Contrary to expectation, the new tomb did not prove to be a near neighbor to the painted tombs discovered eleven years before by Peters and Thiersch. It was a full mile away and not far from the modern village, in a valley running in a south-easterly direction toward the ruins of the old crusading church of St. Anne.

¹ Peters and Thiersch, *Painted Tombs of the Necropolis of Marissa*. Palestine Exploration Fund, 1905.



Right Wall of the Tomb of the Cocks at Beit Jibrin.

In the immediate locality there are two wells that are not widely separated. A short distance beyond the second well (the one more remote from the village), among some old olive trees, on the hillside, at the right of the path, there are traces of an old necropolis which included the present tomb. The appearance of the surface of the ground in this place at the time of my visit



Fig. 1. Present Appearance of the Surface of the Ground.
Opening into Tomb indicated by Cross.

is shown in the first illustration (Fig. 1). To judge from the small, hardened hummocks of dirt, as well as from the state of the growth of the thorn bushes round about, there must have been earlier and unsuccessful attempts to open the tomb. A very little probing would have revealed a scarped surface of rock, but it required not a little patience and effort to burrow down sufficiently deep to reach the doorway.

We entered by sliding down an inclined plane of débris and crawling through a hole scooped out just under the top of the doorway.² It was not possible to decide with any certainty as to the original avenue of approach, nor as to the spaciousness of the court that may have been cut out before the tomb.

Upon entering, one found himself in a small, single tomb-chamber cut

² The opening for the door had an outer width of 20 inches and this increased to 29½ inches on the inside. The top of the door was 5½ inches from the ceiling of the tomb. The threshold and all the lower portions of the door were concealed by débris.

in the soft, chalky limestone that is characteristic of the district. There were three large arcossolia, each containing a sunk bench grave, and in addition, in the front wall, there was a diminutive arched recess on either side of the entrance (Figures 4 and 5).

The tomb, exclusive of the arcossolia, had an average length of about 8 feet, a width of approximately 6 feet 7 inches, and a height at the back (the only place where measurement was possible) of 5 feet 9 inches.³ The arch of the arcossolium on the left as one entered had an extreme width of 5 feet 8 inches, a height of 4 feet 5 inches, and an average depth of 3 feet 6 inches. The sunk bench grave included within it was in the form of a sarcophagus 5 feet 9 inches long, from 2 feet 2 inches to 2 feet 3 inches wide, and from 10 to 12 inches high, with an inside length varying from 5 feet 5 inches to 5 feet 8 inches, and a depth of 1 foot 5 inches. The thickness of the side was about $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches. There was a cushion-head at the inner end, and behind this a projection rose $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches above the edge of the sarcophagus (Plate 1). The dimensions of the remaining arcossolia were much the same, save that the one in the back wall was somewhat wider and consequently the grave included within it was longer.⁴ In the floor at the back of the tomb, just in front of the last named sarcophagus, there was a sunk grave, having a length varying from 6 feet 1 inch to 6 feet 3 inches and a width ranging from 1 foot 5 inches to 1 foot 6 inches. At the time of our visit it was filled with stones and dirt. All the sarcophagi were open, and the stone slabs with which the graves had been covered originally, had been removed and broken.

³ The main chamber, which was irregular in shape, had a length of 9 feet 2 inches at the back and of 8 feet at the front. Its width at the extreme left was 6 feet 5 inches, but this diminished to 5 feet 10 inches near the edge of the door. On the right the width ranged in like manner from 7 feet to 5 feet 10 inches. The height at the back, where the floor was exposed, was 5 feet 7 inches on the left side and 5 feet 11 inches on the right.

⁴ The bottom width of the arch in the back wall was 7 feet and 1 inch; its exact height, not easily determined because of the broken top, was probably 5 feet 6 inches. It had a depth on the left of 3 feet 10 inches, and on the right of 3 feet 8 inches. The grave itself had an inside length of 6 feet 4 inches, and a depth ranging from 1 foot 6 inches at the left end to 1 foot 8 inches at the right end. The cushion-head was at the right, and the projection behind it rose 10 inches above the sides of the sarcophagus. The front side was about 5 inches in thickness.

The arch of the right wall was 6 feet 1 inch wide and 4 feet 8 inches high. Its depth on the left was 3 feet 4 inches, and on the right near the door 2 feet $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The sarcophagus grave here was 5 feet 11 inches long and had an inside width of 1 foot 6 inches at the right end and 1 foot 7 inches at the left end, while the depth was 1 foot $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The outside height of the front side was $12\frac{1}{2}$ inches and its thickness $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. There was a cushion-head at the end farthest from the door and back of this a projection rose 6 inches above the sides of the sarcophagus.

The tool marks gave evidence that picks had been used in the earlier stages of the excavation, and that the walls had then been smoothed with broad-bladed chisels ($3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 inches wide). The whole interior was outlined with red stripes. In addition to this, each of the walls had a rather elaborate scheme of decoration. For this purpose conventional sepulchral

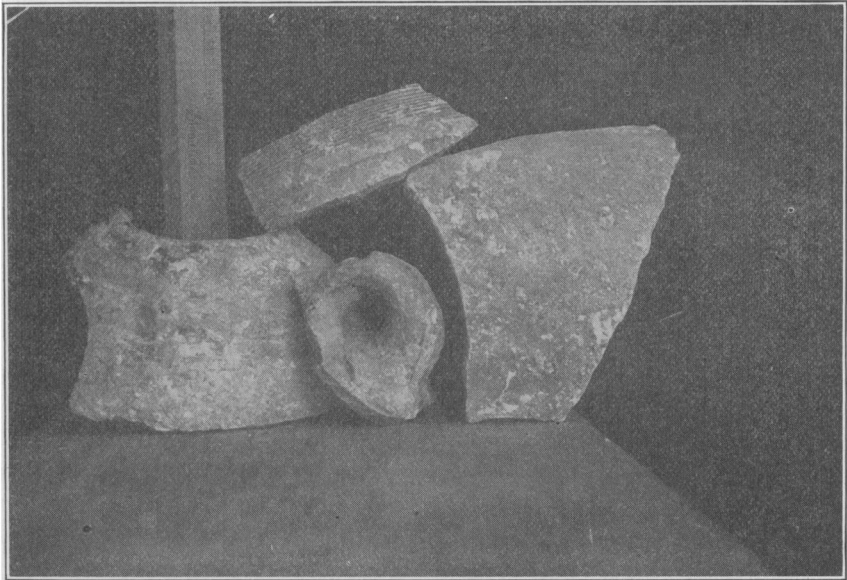


Fig. 2. Fragments of Pottery found in the Tomb of the Cocks.

emblems had been used. On the left wall we could trace the mutilated forms of birds painted in red (Plate 1). There was no evidence of intentional destruction here, but it would appear that the stone had flaked off and had crumbled away from natural causes. In this manner whatever may have been painted in the space between the birds had entirely disappeared. Below the arch, upon the wall within the recess of the arcosolium, there was a flower design, also done in red (Plate 1).

It did not prove possible to secure a comprehensive view of the back wall because the proper adjustment of the camera for such a purpose was prevented by the mass of débris filling the front of the tomb. However, Plates 2 and 3 show the decorations of the spandrels of the wall on the right and left respectively, while Plate 4 gives a full view, lower down within the arch of the arcosolium. Enough remains to prove that peacocks were painted in the spandrels, along with flowers that possibly may have



Plate 1. Left Wall and Arcosolium of the Tomb of the Cocks.



Plate 2. Inner Spandrel of Left Wall and Left Spandrel of Rear Wall.

been intended for anemones. Natural disintegration had caused considerable masses of limestone to break away and had destroyed the entire top of the arch, with whatever adornment it may have possessed. Upon the wall of this arcosolium there were three crosses in red, the central one being surrounded by a wreath tied with a ribbon whose ends were extended in a festoon. The flowers of the wreath were indistinct, but they seemed to show, in addition to the prevailing red, touches of yellow and blue.

The right wall was found to be best preserved and proved in other ways of greatest interest (*Frontispiece*). In the spandrels we have two spirited cocks done in red. Both were intact when I first saw them, on May 12, 1913, but in the interval that elapsed before my next visit, on June 3rd, the cock farthest from the entrance was badly mutilated by the natives. There was likewise a design of flowers, with a cross, just over the center of the arch. Upon the wall within the arcosolium, the sketch of a grapevine with several clusters of fruit could still be seen.

The space above the two diminutive arched recesses in the front, or door-wall, was decorated with crosses (two on either side) and flowers (Figures 4 and 5). The color was red and harmonized with what appeared elsewhere. The niches below, which were almost entirely blocked with débris, had doubtless been intended for the burial of children.⁵ Bliss and Macalister found that one of the characteristics of the tombs of Beit Jibrin was the presence of recesses prepared for such a purpose.⁶ As a rule they were in wall spaces that were not large enough for other uses.

It will be noticed that the crosses are throughout an integral part of the original scheme of decoration, as is shown both by their coloring and by their position. Of themselves they would not necessarily prove this to be a Christian tomb, for the cross has been used as an ornament and as a religious symbol from earliest times. However, their nearly equilateral shape, as well as the emphasis given to them in the design, incline one to believe that they belong to the Byzantine period.⁷ It seems not unlikely

⁵ The niche on the right as one entered was 2 feet 4 inches wide, and that on the left 2 feet 5½ inches.

⁶ *Excavations in Palestine, 1898-1900*, p. 202.

⁷ The cross between the cocks on the left wall was 6½ inches high and 6 inches wide. Its bars had a width of 1¾ inches. On the back wall the central cross was imperfect, but its height was 9½ inches and its width, had it been perfectly preserved, would probably have been 7¾ inches. The other crosses on this wall were 7½ inches high and 6¼ inches wide (right), and 7¾ inches high by 7½ inches wide (left). The bars ranged from 1½ to 1¾ inches in width. The wreath had a perpendicular diameter of 26½ inches, and a horizontal diameter of 25¾ inches. The crosses on the front wall at the right were 5¾ by 5¾ inches (upper) and 4¾ by 4¾ inches (lower); and at the left 5½ by 3¾ inches (upper) and 4¼ by 3¾ inches (lower). The bars were from ¾ to 1½ inches wide.

that originally there were crosses over the arches of the left and back walls similar to those that are now seen at the right between the cocks. Chancing to look up as I was crawling out of the tomb, I saw a small cross cut in the underside of the rock over the doorway. The flowers would indicate the same period, for they were used to adorn Christian tombs at an early



Fig. 3. Pottery reported by a native of Beit Jibrin to have been found in the Tomb of the Cocks.

time. In the case of those resembling anemones, it is possible that the lilies of the field mentioned in the Gospels are intended. The vine also fits in with this conclusion, since it became one of the most important Christian emblems. The same holds true of the birds. Peacocks represented immortality, on the supposition that their flesh was incorruptible. Cocks likewise were looked upon as standing for immortality, or as being heralds of Christ's appearing. Just as their crowing before the break of day announces the coming dawn, so in the darkness of the tomb they were thought of as proclaiming the morn of the resurrection. For this reason they are painted with open beaks, in the act of crowing. In the tomb discovered by Peters and Thiersch, a cock with open beak is to be seen striding away from the doorway leading into the main chamber. His chthonic significance is made evident by the three-headed Cerberus which appears as his counterpart on the other side of the door. In conception and execution, however, this cock is entirely unlike those in our tomb.

Of the objects that the tomb may have contained nothing was discoverable save a few fragments of pottery. They were parts of a large amphora of the Roman type that may well have come from the Byzantine period (Fig. 2). Mr. Macalister found such a one in an unrifled tomb during his excavations at Gezer.⁸

⁸ *Excavations at Gezer*, Vol. 1, p. 361. Palestine Exploration Fund.

I had scant opportunity to investigate other tombs in the immediate vicinity and to gather their testimony. Those into which I did descend were of the same general type, though one or two were much larger and contained more graves. One was outlined in red, but had no further decoration that I could discover. Another had been closed, or at least partially blocked, by a rolling stone marked with a cross (Fig. 6). It may be

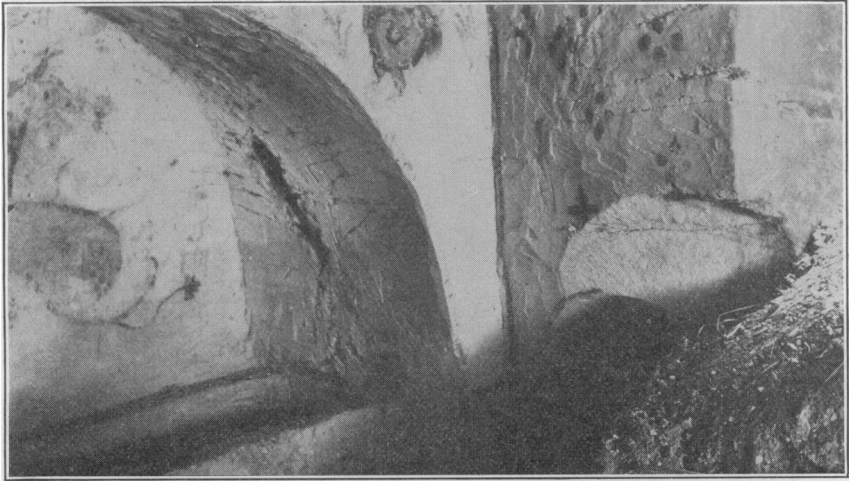


Fig. 4. A Portion of the Right Wall and of the Front or Door Wall.

concluded, then, that this spot is the site of a necropolis constructed by Christians, or that they appropriated to their use one already existing here. We know that Beit Jibrin was early an important Christian center, but we have as yet only fragmentary information as to the development of its history. Crosses occur in the great domed caverns for which the locality is famous. They are also scratched, or painted in red, in some tombs near the ruined church of St. Anne. But, up to the present, no Christian tomb possessing such elaborate decorations as the one here described has come to light in this vicinity, or elsewhere in Palestine.

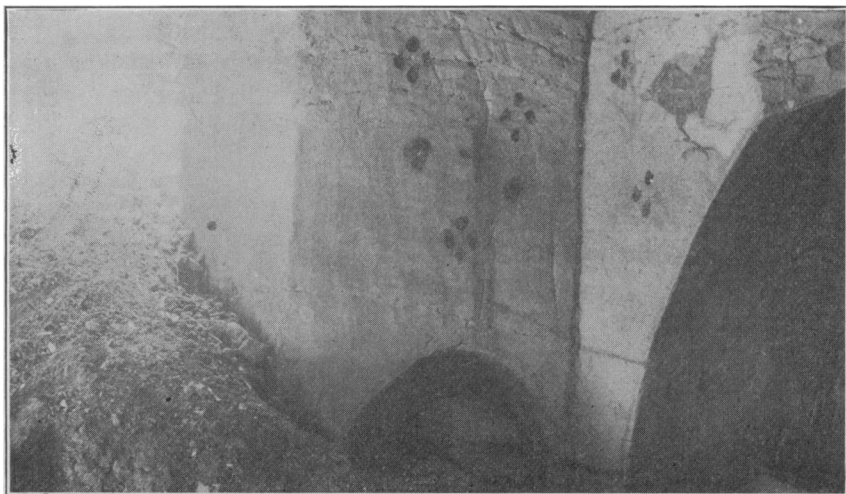


Fig. 5. Portion of the Front or Door Wall and of the Left Wall.

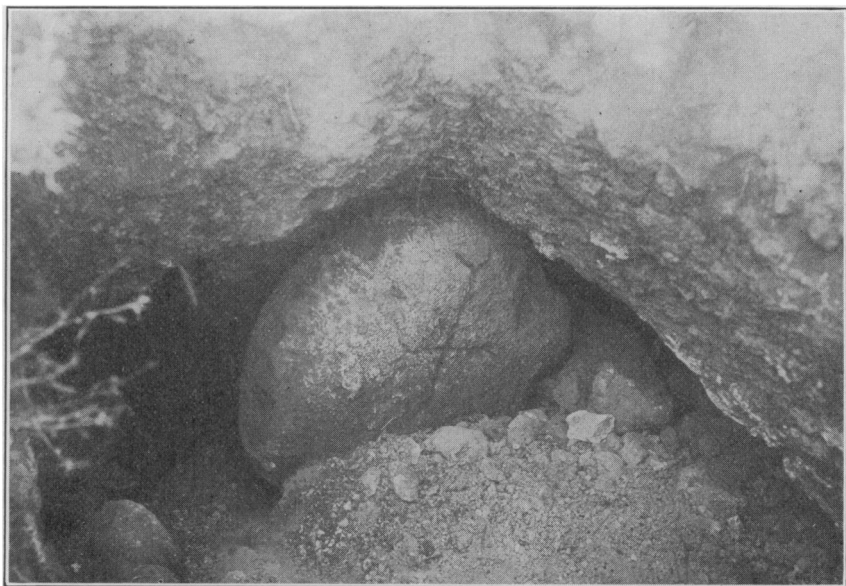


Fig. 6. Rolling Stone marked with a Cross at the Entrance of a Neighboring Tomb.



Plate 3. Right Spandrel of Rear Wall and Inner Spandrel of Right Wall.

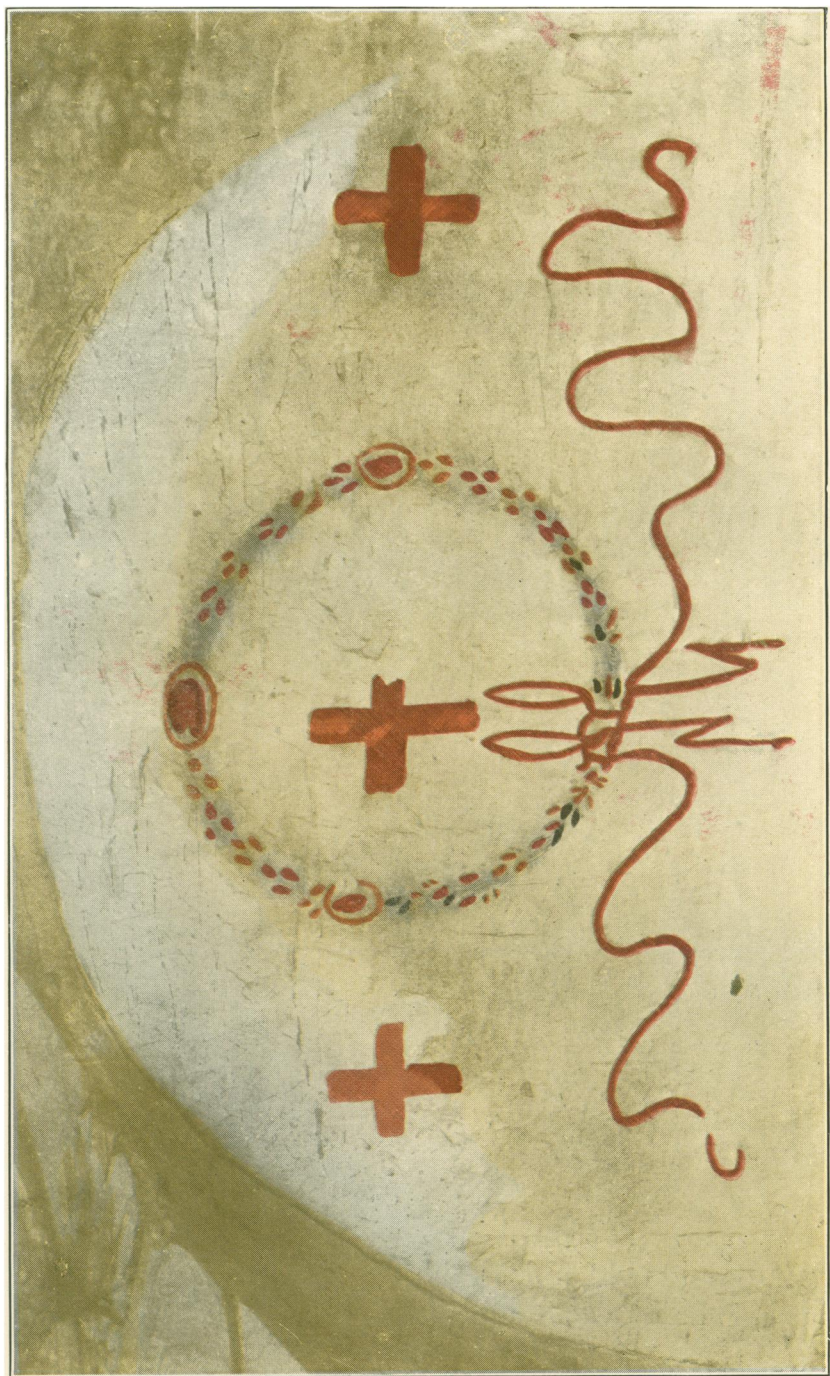


Plate 4. Arcossolium of Rear Wall decorated with Crosses and a Wreath tied with Ribbon.